

Geographical names in Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Michigan, having a Chippewa origin /

GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES IN WISCONSIN, MINNESOTA, AND MICHIGAN, HAVING A CHIPPEWA ORIGIN. BY CHRYSOSTOM VERWYST, O. S. F.1

1 Father Verwyst is a Franciscan missionary among the Chippewas of Wisconsin and Minnesota. He is the author of *Missionary Labors of Fathers Marquette, Menard, and Allouez in the Lake Superior region* (Milwaukee and Chicago, 1886), a valuable monograph. In a letter to me, dated Superior, Wis., June 19, 1892, he says: "Please give due credit, in your introduction to this list of names, to Vincent Roy, a Chippewa merchant of Superior; to Antoine Gordon (Gaudin), of Gordon; and to M. Gurnoe, of Courtes Oreilles, a very intelligent Chippewa scholar, and for many years government Indian interpreter, who kindly assisted me in this matter."— Ed.

In Bishop Baraga's system of Chippewa orthography, the letter *a* is pronounced as in "father," or approximately as *au* in auger; *e*, as *a* in "name;" *i* (short), as in win; *i* (long), as *e* in "seen;" *o*, as in "lone;" *j*, as *s* in "sure;" *g*, as in "go"—never hard, as in "general:" *kw*, as *qu* in "queen." There is no *u* in Chippewa.

The following list of geographical names in Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Michigan, having a Chippewa origin, is by no means exhaustive: it might largely be added to. Having no atlas or other work of geographical reference at hand, I give only such as occur to me.

Ahnapee (town, Wis.)—Corruption of *anin api* (when), contracted into *anipi* (pr. *ah-nah-pee*).

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Aminicon (river, Wis.)—Corruption of *aminikan* (spawning ground). The syllable *ing* or *ng* is added to such words, to designate the locative case, or locality. Thus, *aminikaning* means to, at, or from the spawning ground.

Aniwa (town, Wis.)—Corruption of *aniwi* (those). *Aniwi* (pr. *au-nee-wee*) or *aniwa* refers, as a prefix, to superiority; e.g., *aniwigabawi*, he is taller than the rest; *aniwakiso aw mitag*, that tree is taller than the rest.

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Ashippun (town, Wis.)—Corruption of *ajiopan* (decayed lungs). *Aji* (pr. *ashee*), means decayed; *opan*, his lungs.

Ashwaubenon (creek, Wis.¹

¹ See *Wis. Hist. Coll.*, xi., p. 234, for Vieau's tradition of the origin of the name.— Ed.

)—From *ashiwabiwining* (place where they watch, or keep a lookout,—as for enemies).

Askeaton (town, Wis.)—Corruption of *ashkiodon* (raw mouth). *Ashki* (pr. *ash-kee*), raw; *odon*, his mouth. Perhaps the place is named after some Indian of the locality, who had a raw, or sore mouth.

Bakagama (lake, Wis.)—Bakegama (branch lake; i.e., a lake which is a branch or part of another, generally of a larger, lake). Pr. *bau-kai-gau-mau*.

Checagon (lake, Mich.)—Corruption of *jigagong* (skunk place), pr. *shee-gah-gong*. It is the locative case of *jigag* (skunk), and means at, to, or from the place of skunks.

Chequamegon (bay, Wis.)—Corruption of *chagaouamigoung*, the French method of spelling *jagawamikong* (pr. *shau gau-wau-me-kong*), which mean s, a long, narrow strip of land running into a body of water, such as a lake or bay. A legendary explanation of the name will be found in my *Missionary Labors*, p. 18].

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Chippewa (river and county, Wis.)—Abbreviation of the old *Ojibway*. The Chippewas call themselves *Odjibweg*.

Escanaba (river and town, Mich.)—Mr. Gurnoe says that the Indians of the vicinity call the place *Misconabe* (pr. *mis-co-nau-bai*), from *misko* (red), and *nabe* (man).

Gogebic (lake, Mich.)—From *gogibic* (diving place), pr. *go-gee-beek*. *Gogi* or *kogi* means, he dives down; *bic* refers to a body of water. Some pronounce the word, *Agogebic*, which means, a body of water hanging on high,— *agosi* or *agode* meaning, he or it hangs. The lake in question is situated on a considerable plateau, or elevation.

Ishpeming (town, Mich.)—Means above, on high.

Kalamazoo (river, county, and town, Mich.)—Corruption of *kikanamoso* (it smokes, or he is troubled with smoke e.g., in his wigwam), pr. *kee-kah-nah-mo-zo*, or *kee-kau-nau-mo-zo*.

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Kanabec (county, Minn.)—Corruption of *ginebic* (snake), pr. *gee-na-bik*.

Kaukauna (town, Wis.)—Corruption of *okakaning*, often shortened into *kakaning* (where they fish for pike, or pike fishing grounds), pr. *kau-kau-ning*.

Kegonsa (lake, Wis.)—Corruption of *gigosensag* (lake of small fishes), pr. *gee-gosen-saug*. *Gigo* is fish; *gigosens*, a small fish; *gigosensag*, small fishes.

Kenockee (town, Mich.)—From *ginok* (he is long-legged), pr. *kee-no-kee*.

Kenosha (county and town, Wis.)—Baraga gives it as *kinoje* (pickerel or pike). Doubtless they were plentiful in the waters there.

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Kewaskum (town, Wis.)—Either from *washkamo* (the road is crooked), pr. *wash-cum-o*; from *giweskam* (his tracks are toward home), pr. *kee-wai-skum*; *giwe* means, he goes home.

Kewaunee (county and town, Wis.)—Corruption of *kakiweonan* (I cross a point of land by boat), pr. *kah kee wai-onan*. Such a point of land is the peninsula between Green Bay and Lake Michigan, which is almost cut through by Sturgeon Bay. From *kakiweonan* we also have Kewenaw (Mich.) and Keweena (Wis.), similarly situated on peninsulas almost severed by water.

Koshkonong (lake and town, Wis.)—Probably a corruption of *gwaskwaning* (jumping), pr. *gwash-kwau-ning*. Some Indians pronounce the syllable *wa* like *o*, so they might have pronounced the word *goshkoning*.

Mackinac (island, Mich.)—From *mikinak* (a turtle), pr. *mik-ee-nak*. Refers to the general contour of the island. Mackinaw is another form of Mackinac.

Manawa (town, Wis.)—From either *minawa* (adverb, meaning again); *manea* (it is scarce), pr. *mau-na-au*; or *manepwa* (he has no tobacco, or, scarce of tobacco), pt. *mau-naip-wau*.

Manistique (river, lake, and town, Mich.)—From *manitigweia* (crooked river), pr. *mau-nee-teeg-wai-a*.

Manitowoc (county and town, Wis.)—Corruption of 393 *manitowag* (spirit spawn). Pagan Indians imagined that spirits spawn like fish.

Mattawan (town, Mich.)—Corruption of *mittawang* (sand).

Mazomanie (town, Wis.)—From *mosominan* (mooseberries), pr. *mo-zom-ee-nan*.

Meeme (town, Wis.)—Means pigeon, or dove.

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Menominee (river, Wis.)—Corruption of *manominig* , or *oumanominig* , meaning wild-rice people; *manomin* means wild rice, and *manominike* , he gathers wild rice.

Mequon (town, Wis.)—From *miquan* (a feather), pr. *mee-gwaun* .

Michigamme (lake and town, Mich.)—From *michagami* (a large body of water), pr *mich-ah-gau-mee* .

Michigan (lake and state)—Probably a corruption of the above. The Chippewas gave the name *kitchigami* (pr. *kee-chee-gau-mee*) to Lake Superior, or other large bodies of water.

Milwaukee (river and town, Wis.)—M. Gaudin says it is from *minwaki* (good land). In Chippewa, the letter *n* is used instead of *l* , which latter is not found in pure Chippewa words. Mr. Gurnoe derives Milwaukee from *minewaki* (a promontory), pr. *mee-nai-wau-kee* . Such a promontory does project into the river there, being known of old as Walker's Point.

Minong (Isle Royale, Lake Superior)— The Chippewa name for this island is pr. *mee-nong* , and means a good, high place.

Misha Mokwa (town, Wis.)—Means, great bear. The word is used to designate a bear of extraordinary size—the patriarch, as it were, of all bears.

Missaukee (county, Mich.)—Corruption of *missisaging* (at the large mouth of a river), pr. *mis-si-saug-ing* . *Mishi* or *missi* refers, in compound words, to largeness; and *sauging* means, at the mouth of a river.

Mississippi (river)—Corrupt form of *mishisibi* (large river), pr. *mee-shee-see-bee* . *Misi* , or *michi* , is large, and *sibi*, river. The Chippewa also call it *missisibi* (pr. *mee-see-see-bee*), and *messisibi* (pr. *mes-sis-see-bee*). They also say, *michisagaigan* (large inland lake), pr. *mee-shee-sau-gie-gan* .

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Mosinee (falls and town, Wis.)—From *mosinig* (moose), pr. *mo-see-neeg* . There were probably Indians at these falls, in olden times, who were thus called from their tribal totem.

Mukwanago (lake and town, Wis.)—Perhaps from *mak-wanagong* (bear-lair, or place where the bear lies), pt. *mauk-wau-na gong* .

Muscoda (town, Wis.)—Corruption of *mashkodeng* (prairie). The French applied this name, corrupted into *Mascoutin* , to a tribe of Indians on the upper Fox river, in Wisconsin, because they lived in a prairie country. Muscatine, Iowa, is another corruption.

Muskego (town, Wis.), and **Muskegon** (town, Mich.)—Corruption of *mashkigong* (the locative case of *mashkig* , and means at, to, or from a swamp), pt. *mush-kee-gong* .

Nahma (town, Mich.)—From *namé* (sturgeon), pt. *na mai* .

Namekagon (river, Wis.)—From *namekagan* (sturgeon ground, or place of the sturgeons).

Nashotah (town, Wis.)—Corruption of *nijode* (a twin), pr. *nee-sho-da* .

Nebagamain (lake, Wis.)—Corruption of *nibegomowin* (watching for game at night, in a boat).

Necedah (town, Wis.)—Corruption of *nissida* (let there be three of us), pr. *nis-see-dah* .

Neebish (island and town, Mich.)—From *nibish* (bad water). In the Ottawa, an inland lake is called *nibish* .

Negaunee (town, Mich.)—Corruption of *nigani* (he walks ahead), pr. *nee-gau-nee* .

Nekimi (town, Wis.)—Mr. Gurnoe thinks this a corruption of *nikimin* (wild-goose berry), pr. *nee-kee-min* . *Nika* is goose, and *min* berry. These berries grow along the shores of rivers and lakes, and wild geese feed on them.

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Nemadji (Indian name for Left Hand river, Minn.)—It is generally supposed that *nemadji* means left hand, hence the English name of the river, which is to the left as you enter Superior bay through the eastern channel. Thus: 395 *namandji* means left; *namandjinik* , left arm; and *namandjinindj* , left hand. But Mr. Gurnoe says *nemadji* comes from *nemadjitigweiag* (a river falling perpendicularly from a considerable elevation).

Noquet, Bay de (bay, Mich.)—From *noke* (bear totem), pr. *no-ka* . Indians lived on its shores, having the bear as their totem.

Oconomowoc (lake and town, Wis.)—Corruption of *okonimawag* (beaver-dam), pr. *o-con-ee-mau-wag* . There were probably several beaver dams in the neighborhood.

Ogema (town, Wis.)—From *ogima* (a chief), pr. *o-gee mau* .

Ogemaw (county, Mich.)—Also from *ogima* .

Okee (town, Wis.)—From *aki* (land), pr. *au-kee* .

Okemos (town, Mich.) Corruption of *ogemans* (little chief), pr. *o-kee-mauns* .

Omena (town, Mich.)— Corruption of *o minan* (he gives to him), pr. *o-mee-nan* .

Onekama (town, Mich.)—From *onikama* (an arm). Ontonagon (river, county, and town, Mich.)—Corruption of *nandonagon* (place where game is shot by guess—that is, not by seeing it, but judging of its location from some noise or movement in the brush). An incident of this kind, happening a few times to an Indian, might induce him to give the locality this name. This seems to be the true explanation of the name. In maps of the seventeenth century, it is called *Nantonagan* . Bishop Baraga derives the word from *nind onagan* (my dish), but I think the first explanation, given me by Antoine Gaudin, of Gordon, Wis., a smart half-breed, is the more correct.

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Opechee (town, Mich.)—Baraga's orthography is *opitchi* (the American robin).

Ossinike (town, Mich.)—Corruption of *assinike* (he gathers stones).

Ottawa (towns, Minn., Wis., and Ill.)—From the name of the Indian tribe, which is derived from an obsolete word, *adattawag* (trading people). *Atawe* , or *attawe* means, he trades, he sells. In Bishop Baraga's *Dictionary of the Otchipwe Language* (Cincinnati, 1853), p. 332, other derivations are given. I give that of William Whipple Warren, 396 in his *History of the Ojibways* (Minn. Hist. Coll., v., p. 21). Warren was a very intelligent half-breed Indian, and his interpretation of Indian words is generally reliable.

Outagamie (county, Wis.)—The name given by the Chippewas to their ancient enemies, the Foxes. Baraga's orthography is, *odagamig* , an adverb meaning, people living on the other shore—of a river, or a lake.

Ozaukee (county, Wis.) and **Sauk** (also a Wisconsin county)—Both of them corruptions of *ozagig* (people living at a river mouth), pr. *o-zau-kee* .

Packwaukee (town, Wis.) Corruption of *bagwaki* (forest opening). pr. *baug-wau-kee* .

Paw Paw (town, Mich.)—Chippewa for papa, or father.

Penokee (range of hills, and town, Wis.)—Corruption of *opinikan* (wild potato ground), pr. *o pee-nee-kan* .

Pensaukee (town, Wis.)—Corruption of *pindjsagi* (inside the mouth of a river), pr. *pindj-sau-gee* .

Petoskey (town, Mich.) From *pitoskig* (between two swamps), pr. *pee tos-keeg* . This is Mr. Gurnoe's explanation.

Pewamo (town, Mich.)—From *biwamo* (the trail diverges).

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Pewaukee (town, Wis.)—Corruption of *nibiwaki* (swampy), pr. *nee-bee-wau-kee* . The Indians frequently swallow, as it were, the first syllable of a word, so that whites often do not recognize that it has been sounded. So also, the former use *p* and *b*, *k* and *g* , and *t* and *d* , indifferently. This leads to much confusion in attempts at English phonetic spelling of Indian words.

Poygan (lake and town, Wis.)—Vincent Roy, an intelligent Chippewa of Superior, Wis., thinks the word a corruption of *opwagan* (pipe), pr. *op-wau-gan* . Perhaps Lake Poygan may have some resemblance to a pipe, of which the river is, as it were, the stem and the lake the head. Indians are quick to notice such peculiarities.

Poy Sippi (town, Wis.) Corruption of *Bwan sibi* (Sioux river), pr. *bwaun-see-bee* . *Bwan* is Chippewa for Sioux, and *sibi* for river.

Puckaway (lake, Wis.) From *Bokawe* (pr. *bo-kau-wai*), an Indian supposed to have formerly lived on its shores.

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Saginaw (bay and town, Mich.)—Corruption of *osaginang* (place where the Sacs used to live). *Osagig* is Chippewa for Sacs.

Saugatuck (town, Mich.)—From *sagatagan* (spunk or punk, used by Indians as tinder), pr. *sau-gau-tau-gan*.

Shawano (lake, county, and town, Wis.)—Baraga's orthography is, *jawanong* (in the south). The French *Chiouaonan*, and the English *Shawnee*, were corrupt forms of the same Indian word. meaning southern people.

Sheboygan (county and town, in Wis.; and river, county, and town. in Mich.)—From *jibaigan* (any perforated object, as a pipe stem).

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Shiocton (town, Wis.)—Corruption of *ajeatan* (it floats up stream,—by force of wind), pr. *au-shai-au-taun*.

Siskowit (lake, Wis.)—From *siskawit* (very fat lake trout).

Skanes (town, Mich.)—Corruption of *eshkani* (horn river), pr. *ai-shkan-ee*.

Suamico (town), and **Little Suamico** (river, Wis.)—Corruption of *ossawamigong* (place of the yellow beaver).

Tawas (lake, Mich.)—Corruption of Ottawas. Tawas was the name of an Indian chief.

Tekonsha (town, Mich.)—Corruption of *attikonsan* (little caribou, or rein-deer), pr. *at-tik-on-saun*. *Attik* is reindeer; *attikon* is the diminutive form; *attikonsan* is plural.

Totogatic (river, Wis.)—Means boggy river. *Totogan* is a bog.

Wahjamega (town, Mich.)—Baraga gives the original as *wajamika* (fish-hole, a depression in a lake or river, where fish collect), pr. *wau-jau-mee-ka*.

Waneka (town, Wis.)—Means, he digs a hole.

Waubesa (lake, Wis.)—Corruption of *wabisi* (swan lake), pr. *wau-bee-see*.

Waucedah (town, Mich.)—Perhaps derived from *wassiti*, (it reflects light), pr. *wau-see-dai*.

Waugoshance (island, Mich.)—Means, a small fox.

Waukegan (town, Ill.)—From *waukaigan* (house).

Waukesha (county and town, Wis.)—Corruption of *wagoshag* (foxes), pr. *wah-go-shag*. Either there were many 398 foxes there, or the Indians of the district had the fox for their totem.

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Waunakee (town, Wis.)—Baraga's orthography is *wanaki* , the pronunciation being the same. It means, he has peace, or he lives in peace.

Waupun (town, Wis.)—Corruption of *waban* (east), pr. *wan-ban* .

Wausau (town, Wis.)—Corruption of *wassa* (far away), pr. *waus-sau* .

Wausaukee (river, Wis.)—Corruption of *awassaki* (over, or beyond the hill), from *au-waus-sau-kee* .

Wauwatosa (town, Wis.)—Corruption of *wewatessi* (firefly), pr. *wai-wau-tais-see* .

We-que-ton-sing (town, Mich.)—From *wikwedonsing* (at the little bay), pr. *wee-que-don-sing* . *Wikwed* means bay; *wikwedons* is the diminutive.

Weyauwega (town, Wis.)—Corruption of *ouiawikan* (he embodies it. or makes it his body), pt. *o-wee-au-wee-kan* . Probably some Indian legend is attached to the place, which gave it the name. Menabosho, the great Algonkin demigod, used to assume different shapes.

Winnebago (take. Wis.)—Named from the Indian tribe. A corruption of *winnibigoug* (dirty-water people). Winnipeg, in Manitoba, is the same word, modified. In Chippewa, *winnibi* (pr. *wee-nee-bee*), is dirty water.

Winneconne (town, Wis.)—From *winikaning* (a dirty place), pr. *wee-nee-kau-ning* . The syllable *win* refers to any thing unclean. There is a deal of mud on the flats around Winneconne.

Winnibigoshish (take, Minn.)—Means bad, dirty-water lake. *Win* , is dirty; *nibi* , water; *big* or *bic* , refers to bodies of water; *oshish* is a term of contempt—miserable, bad.

Wisconsin (river and state)—A. Gaudin says it means, muskrat house. But this is doubtful. I have not found two Indians to agree on the meaning of this word.

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Wonewoc (town, Wis.)—Corruption of *wonowag* (they howl,—e. g., wolves). pr. *wo.no-waug* .